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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes findings from a study of Americans' attitudes toward teaching, educational opportunity, and school reform, examining: what Americans feel must be done to ensure that all schools become what they should be, teachers' roles in fulfilling the quest for higher student achievement, and how well current and proposed reform efforts measure up to the public's expectations for its schools. Surveys of 2,525 adults nationwide indicate that most Americans believe that once the issue of school safety is addressed, providing a qualified teacher in every classroom is the most important way to improve education and lift student achievement. They feel that doing what it takes to put a fully qualified teacher in every classroom is more important than offering educational vouchers or having for-profit companies run public schools. Respondents agree that most students are capable of learning, and demanding that all students meet the same academic standards is important. They believe that negative student behaviors are the main problem in public schools. They strongly favor more time for teacher development and planning. Respondents perceive that teachers are not well paid, but they consider teaching the profession that most benefits society. The teacher survey is appended. (SM)

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ED 453 155

The Essential Profession

A National Survey of Public Attitudes
Toward Teaching, Educational Opportunity
and School Reform

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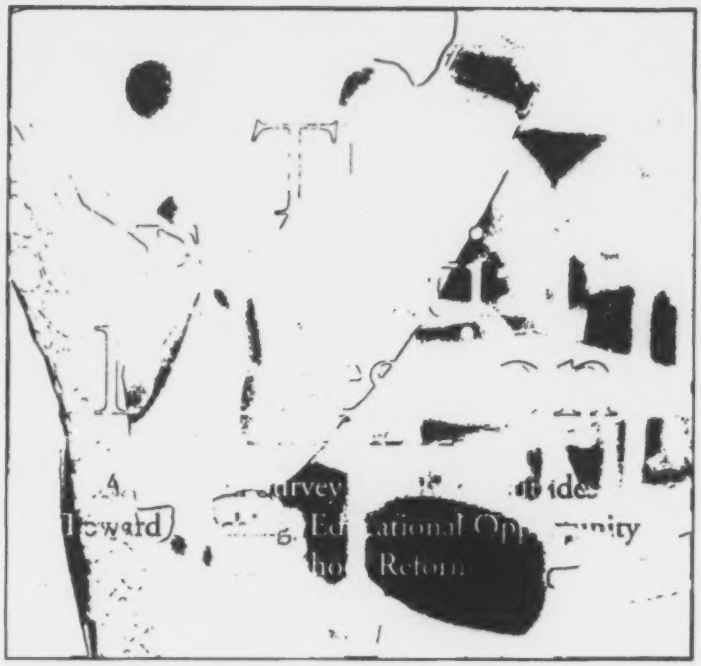

by
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At a time when Americans view improving the quality of education as the most pressing issue confronting the nation, an overwhelming majority of the public considers improving the quality of teaching as the most important way to improve public education. A landmark national opinion poll, conducted by Recruiting New Teachers, Inc. and public opinion analyst Louis Harris, shows the public strongly believes not only that quality teaching is the basic building block of better schools, but also that better teachers are the key to the American dream, particularly for the nation's most disadvantaged students.

According to the poll, which was funded by Philip Morris Companies Inc., roughly nine out of ten Americans believe the best way to lift student achievement is to ensure a qualified teacher in every classroom. Once the issue of student safety is addressed, the public believes that providing a qualified teacher in every classroom—not standards, tests, vouchers, privatization, or school uniforms—is the most important way to improve education today.

The quality and caliber of teachers was chosen as having "the greatest influence on student learning" by more than half (55%) of the American people, a choice that was favored over establishing a system of academic standards (30%) or requiring achievement tests in core academic subjects (14%).

When vouchers were pitted as a reform strategy directly against "doing what it takes to put a fully qualified teacher in every classroom," the teacher quality agenda won hands down by an 84% to 14% margin. Similarly, "doing what it takes to put a qualified teacher in every classroom" was preferred over allowing outside for-profit companies to run schools within the public system by a commanding 87% to 11% majority.

America's Teacher Recruitment Challenges

The nation's teaching force is at a demographic crossroads. By 2008, schools will need to hire more than 2.2 million teachers to serve growing student enrollments and to replace the considerable number of current teachers expected to retire in coming years. There is already a need for teachers in a broad range of subject areas, including math, science, bilingual and special education. Where education officials face high rates of attrition for beginning teachers, such as in urban schools, the recruitment challenge is even greater.

As national, state, and local policymakers consider new initiatives to meet these challenges, understanding the public's views on teaching is vital. Any proposal, whether designed to expand the pool of prospective teachers, improve the preparation and quality of teacher candidates, strengthen support

for novice teachers, or to improve the practice of all teachers at various stages in their careers, will require public support.

What Teachers Give to America

The survey shows that the public knows that teaching gives more back to America than any other profession.

When asked which of eight professions they felt "provides the most important benefit to society," the public put teachers first by more than a 3:1 margin over physicians (62% vs. 17%). When the identical question was asked in 1996, fewer people (57%) put teachers over physicians. In 1988, even fewer people (35%) cited teachers in a closely comparable poll.

Asked about a career they would recommend to a family member, people ranked teaching (39%) a close second to medicine (40%), despite the well-established differences in pay.

Another indicator of the profession's solid public esteem is that when asked how much influence different people had on their career choices, people placed teachers (24%) in second place behind their parents (48%).

Quality Gap: A Mandate for Focusing on the Disadvantaged

The poll findings demonstrate an awareness of the importance of teacher quality that cuts across all socioeconomic strata. Eighty-three percent of the public strongly agreed that "we should ensure that all children, including those who are economically disadvantaged, have teachers who are fully qualified, even if this means spending more money to achieve that."

An identical 83% also felt that "we must give a high national priority to recruiting and preparing teachers who can provide quality education for our children, especially those who are in most need to be helped to learn." Research indicates that unlicensed or underqualified teachers are most likely to be found in economically deprived districts. In the poll, low-income and minority Americans were more likely to rate teachers as unqualified than were non-minorities and higher wage earners. While only one in four Americans thought that the problem of poor quality teachers was "very serious and widespread," 36% of those surveyed earning between $15,001 and $25,000 felt that way. In addition, 38% of Latinos and 42% of blacks said the problem was "very serious and widespread." At the same time, respondents gave relatively high marks to the teachers in their own communities and states. However, the fact that a 79% to 19% majority favored "giving parents specific information at the beginning of the school year on how qualified their child's teachers are according to state standards required for permanent teachers," suggests that the public takes the teacher quality challenge seriously and wants to be assured that teachers are making the grade.

Time for Teacher Improvement

The survey found significant support for increased spending on two fronts: to ensure qualified teachers, especially in schools serving low-income and minority students, and to pay for extra time

spent in the school day and throughout the school year for professional development of teachers. Seventy-one percent agreed with the statement that "public schools should pay teachers for longer work days so they have time to stay up with new developments in their fields." Sixty-one percent were in favor of lengthening the school year and providing more time within each school day for professional development of teachers, compared with 36% who were opposed to such measures.

Keys to Improving Teacher Quality

The public believes that teaching requires special training and skills, not simply a good general education. More than three quarters of the people surveyed said they would oppose allowing people with bachelor's degrees to become teachers without requiring preparation in the field of education. The survey found strong agreement regarding the value of teacher education (93%), with the public rejecting the notion that "good teachers are born and not made" by more than 2:1.

The list of qualities the public felt are "very important for an excellent teacher to have" includes: "being well-trained and knowledgeable about how to teach effectively" (92%) and "being thoroughly educated in the subjects they will teach" (91%).

Six other top attributes were not far behind: "ability to establish good relationships with children and adolescents" (90%); "understanding how people learn" (90%); "ability to communicate well with parents" (86%); "basic sensitivity to each child as an individual" (83%); "at least one semester's experience in a classroom as a student teacher" (79%); and "in-depth understanding of child and adolescent development" (76%). Two credentials often considered as highly important: "a strong liberal arts education" and "a master's degree from an accredited school of education" were only cited as "very important" by 37% of the public.

Teacher unions came off with mixed marks in the study. While a 55% to 34% majority agreed that "teacher unions support setting high standards for teachers," a comparable 53% to 32% majority held the view that "teacher unions too often stand in the way of real reform."

The Making of a Teacher

To meet the expected teacher hiring demands, the public favored more stringent teacher licensing standards tied to standards for student performance, better pay, and more opportunities for teachers to learn while practicing.

More than eight out of ten said they would strengthen state teacher licensing standards rather than lower them. The public also particularly supported providing stronger mentoring for new teachers using able veteran teachers to offer them guidance and support (91%).

A federally sponsored loan forgiveness program for prospective teachers who agree to work in disadvantaged schools received a 67% approval rating. The public also overwhelmingly favored attracting more people currently working in other fields into teacher

preparation (78%) and paying higher salaries to those who teach science or math (65%)—two areas experiencing shortages. However, the public was extremely skeptical about quick fixes to meet expected shortages, such as bypassing teacher education by letting bachelor's degree recipients become teachers without proper training (78% opposed vs. 20% in favor), or lowering state licensing requirements for teachers (84% opposed vs. 15% in favor).

The Issue of Pay

A majority (56%) of people surveyed indicated they themselves would consider becoming a teacher if guaranteed a $60,000 annual salary. Eighty-one percent said they would consider recommending teaching as a career to a family member if the pay was $60,000.

Nearly eight out of ten people said teachers' salaries should be raised over the next 10 years as a way to get more qualified teachers into the schools. Seven in ten felt that teachers were "just adequately paid" or "inadequately paid." Only a third believed teachers' pay should be tied to student test scores. All but a small percentage said that having a competent, caring and qualified teacher should be a national goal even if it means spending more money to achieve that end.

High Standards Supported for All Students

The public also believes that public education remains the key to the American dream. The results showed a firm rejection of a "Bell Curve" approach to student performance. More than 68% of respondents felt "strongly" or "somewhat strongly" that most children are capable of learning demanding academic subject matter and should be required to meet the same academic standards. Minorities (79% for Latinos and 71% for blacks) were more likely than their white counterparts to feel "strongly" or "somewhat strongly" about the need for rigorous academic standards for all children.

More than 60% said that hard work primarily determines a student's academic performance, while only about 19% said that natural ability determines it.

Teachers Still Face Formidable Classroom Challenges

The public cited a whole roster of problems in the public schools that are "very serious and widespread": 68% viewed "student drug use" as a major problem in the schools; 65% cited "school violence," a reflection of deep apprehension over the threat of guns and other weapons widely available to children today; 64% saw "student

drinking" as a serious problem; 59% cited "lack of parental involvement" as a major deficit in today's educational environment; 58% believed that "teenage pregnancy" is a serious problem; 51% felt that "students' lack of basic skills" is a deterrent to achieving a first-rate education. Thirty-five percent scored large classes as a "very serious and widespread" problem; 26% rated "poor-quality teachers" that way. The "lack of choice about what school a child can attend"; "out-of-date subject matter"; and the "lack of up-to-date technology and computers" were all at the bottom of what the public deemed to be "very serious and widespread" problems. Only 16% felt that "school uniforms" are an important way to make schools better.

Summing Up

The report provides an unusually in-depth view of the public's attitudes toward teaching, school improvement, and equal educational opportunity. The consensus that emerges from the findings is the need to place primary emphasis in school reform on teacher quality. The desire to "keep the guarantee of a free public education for every child" was affirmed by a nearly unanimous 98% of those surveyed in the poll as well. In the end, most Americans believe that the promise of top-quality education can be achieved in the public schools, but only if we recruit, train, and develop a teaching corps capable of doing the job.

A Word About This Study

This report summarizes the findings of a study designed to better understand Americans' attitudes about teaching, educational opportunity, and school reform. By most measures, education has become the number one domestic policy concern of the American people. This fact, combined with the substantial teacher recruitment challenges the nation faces over the next decade and the rise in calls to strengthen teacher quality as a critical component of educational improvement, provided the temporal trigger and context for the survey.

Thus, this study sought answers to some central questions: What do Americans feel must be done to ensure that the nation's schools become all they should be? What roles are teachers expected to fulfill in the quest for higher student achievement? How well do current and proposed reform efforts measure up to the public's expectations for its schools?

The survey tested a "quality teacher agenda" against such proposed reforms as new student standards, class size reduction, school uniforms, private school vouchers, and charter schools run by for-profit corporations. In addition, the survey tested public views about the importance of public schools themselves. Within the public school context, issues in urban education, diversity in staff composition, and access to equal educational opportunities for racial minorities and the disadvantaged were tested, as well. Finally, a central target of the inquiry was what the public believes constitutes a "fully qualified" teacher.

In all, cross-sections of 2,525 adults nationwide were surveyed. A cross-section of 1,504 adults nationwide was surveyed between August 12 and September 14, 1998, while a cross-section of 1,021 adults was surveyed in California between August 21 and September 12, 1998. Both studies employed probability methodologies which ensured that each in the universe sample had an equal chance of being represented in the sample interviewed. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2% in 95 out of 100 cases.

The survey questionnaire instrument was designed by Louis Harris and David Haselkorn, with the active consultation of Dr. Elizabeth Fideler. Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond of Stanford University; Dr. Joan Baratz Snowden, Deputy Director in the Educational Issues Department at the American Federation of Teachers; and Dr. Harvey Hunt and Margaret Gaston of The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning provided helpful comment and critique during the questionnaire's development. (N.B. Louis Harris and Dr. Darling-Hammond are members of the Board of Recruiting New Teachers, Inc. David Haselkorn is President and CEO of RNT. Dr. Elizabeth Fideler is Vice President for Research and Policy at the organization.) The authors also gratefully acknowledge the diligent assistance provided by Ms. Elizabeth Gross, policy assistant at RNT.

The interviewing, sample preparation, and computer processing of the data were conducted by an independent national research firm (Peter Harris Research Group). Louis Harris worked closely with the Peter Harris organization on the execution of the survey design in the field. All of the original computer runs and analyses are available upon request. A copy of the questionnaire is included at the conclusion of this report.

The survey was sponsored by Philip Morris Companies Inc. Funding for the California sample was provided by The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning.

Background

For the second year in a row, a record number of students entered our nation's schools. By 2008, America will educate nearly two million more children than today—more than 54 million young people. These K-12 enrollment increases are occurring just as teacher retirements across the nation are beginning to accelerate due to the advancing length of service of many in the profession. As a result of these trends and other forces over the next decade, more than two million teachers will need to be hired to staff the nation's classrooms. This is a recruitment challenge that is equivalent to hiring every doctor in this country more than two-and-one-half-times over. Simply stated, if America's educational goals are to be realized, our schools will need to recruit, hire, and develop the largest, best-prepared, and most diverse generation of teachers this nation has ever known.

Teacher shortages have already reached critical proportions in fields such as science, mathematics, bilingual education, and special education; in regions experiencing the greatest population increases (e.g., California, Nevada, and Texas, among others); in urban schools; and with respect to teachers from diverse racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds.[1] In addition, attrition rates for new teachers in urban districts can often approach 30%-50% in the first five years of teaching—further adding to the demand side of the urban teacher challenge.

Business and the military spend billions on human resource development, recognizing its key role in effective organizational performance. Yet despite the nation's growing teacher challenge, the sad fact is that many districts lack the knowledge and expertise needed to identify new pools of prospective teachers and recruit the qualified and diverse teachers they require. Commenting on this state of affairs two years ago, the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future scored scattershot teacher recruitment and slipshod selection and hiring efforts nationwide, noting that "recruiting, preparing, and retaining good teachers is the central strategy for improving our schools."

The survey which follows was undertaken by Recruiting New Teachers, Inc. to gauge the public's understanding of the nation's teacher recruitment, development, and diversity challenges—and to assess public support for a variety of initiatives that have been proposed to address them. In a time of heightened political interest in education, the survey also explicitly sought to measure the potential impact on voters that the issue of teacher quality might have—especially when compared with other issues that have held a high place in education reform discussions in recent years (e.g., new student standards; tougher tests; class size reduction; school uniforms; private school vouchers; and charter schools run by for-profit corporations).

[1] A 1996 RNT survey of human resource officials in 47 of the nation's largest urban school districts found:
Most districts (85%) had an immediate demand for special education teachers;
About two thirds of the responding districts said they had an immediate demand for teachers in science (69%); math (67%); and bilingual education (64%); and nearly all districts (92%) cited an immediate demand for teachers of color.

An Overview of the Findings

Recognition of the importance of quality teaching cuts across all groups and socio-economic strata.

The results provide an unusually in-depth portrait of public attitudes about teaching, one that reveals clear-cut appreciation of the difference that quality teaching makes to student outcomes and the nation's future. Despite myriad challenges facing education today, recognition of the importance of quality teaching cuts across all groups and socioeconomic strata. Once the issue of school safety is addressed, the public concludes that qualified teachers are the heart of school reform and is willing to support a far bolder agenda to ensure a qualified teacher in every classroom.

Taken together, the findings show the American public:

- Understands the central role that quality teaching plays in school improvement;
- Appreciates the complexity and breadth of knowledge and skills required to be a fully qualified teacher;
- Supports a broader public investment in teacher learning by investing in extra time in the school year and the school day for professional development;
- Is skeptical of quick-fix solutions that propel unprepared candidates into the profession;
- Would like to be provided greater information on teacher qualifications;
- Acknowledges the vital role teacher training institutions must play in strengthening the profession and in preparing teaching's next generation;
- Recognizes the importance of public education and supports a broad-based commitment to it;
- Understands (and supports) the need to spend more money to ensure qualified teachers, particularly for low-income and minority school children;
- Supports putting a qualified teacher in every classroom as a more powerful reform strategy than providing parents public money for private schools;
- Endorses providing new teachers stronger mentoring and support by able veterans;
- Accords teaching a potentially higher attractiveness as a prospective career choice than is often assumed; and
- Recognizes the benefits that teachers and teaching provide society—outpacing all other careers polled (including medicine) by more than 3:1.

Key Findings

Negative Student Behaviors Top List of Concerns

The public understands that public schools today face a wide variety of challenges. Among those rated "very serious and widespread" are behavioral issues, such as drug use, school violence, student drinking, lack of parental guidance, and the like. Teacher quality stands lower in the list of the public's concerns. In fact, among those problems rated most severe (i.e., "very serious and widespread") poor quality teachers ranked 11th out of 14 possible choices, well behind core issues of negative student behaviors, lack of parental involvement, and large classes. However, while only one in four Americans overall thinks that the problem of poor quality teachers is "very serious and widespread," a greater 36% of respondents in the $15,001-$25,000 income category identify the problem this way. This variance tracks with the higher incidence of individuals teaching out of field or on substandard certificates in low-income communities.[2] In addition, 38% of Latinos polled, and 42% of blacks, scored the problem of teacher quality as "very serious and widespread."

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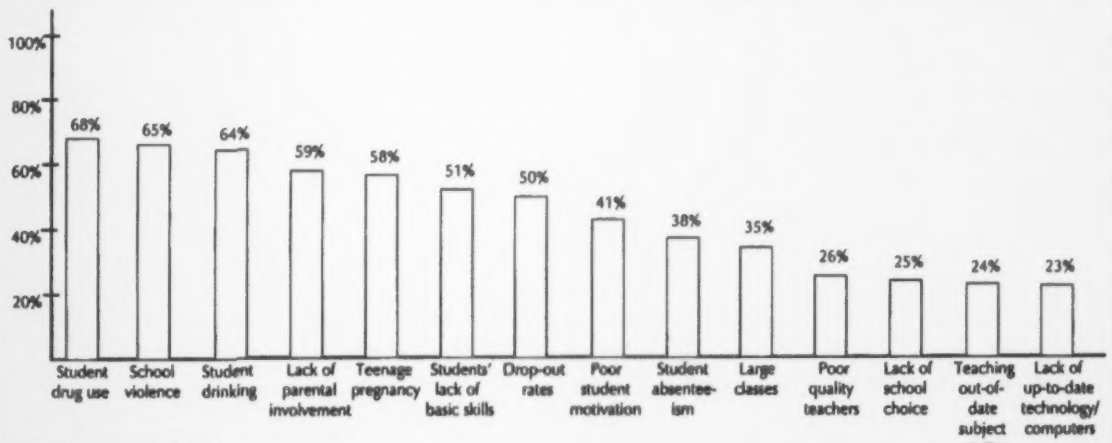
TABLE 1
PUBLIC SCHOOL PROBLEMS VIEWED AS VERY SERIOUS AND WIDESPREAD



More than one response allowed

[2]N.B. Among public secondary school students in high-poverty schools the problem of underprepared teachers is most severe: 19% of those in English classes, 26% of those in mathematics classes, and 14% of those in chemistry classes are taught by a teacher with neither a major nor a minor in the field. Source: NCES, *The Condition of Education*, 1998.

Qualified Teachers Seen as Most Important Rx for Student Improvement

In contrast, when asked to rate the importance of specific measures for lifting student achievement, the public rated "ensuring a well-qualified teacher in every classroom" second only to "keeping schools safe from violence" (90% to 92% respectively). When the categories of "very important" and "somewhat important" are combined, ensuring a well-qualified teacher in every classroom (99%) comes out dead even with "schools safe from violence" (99%).

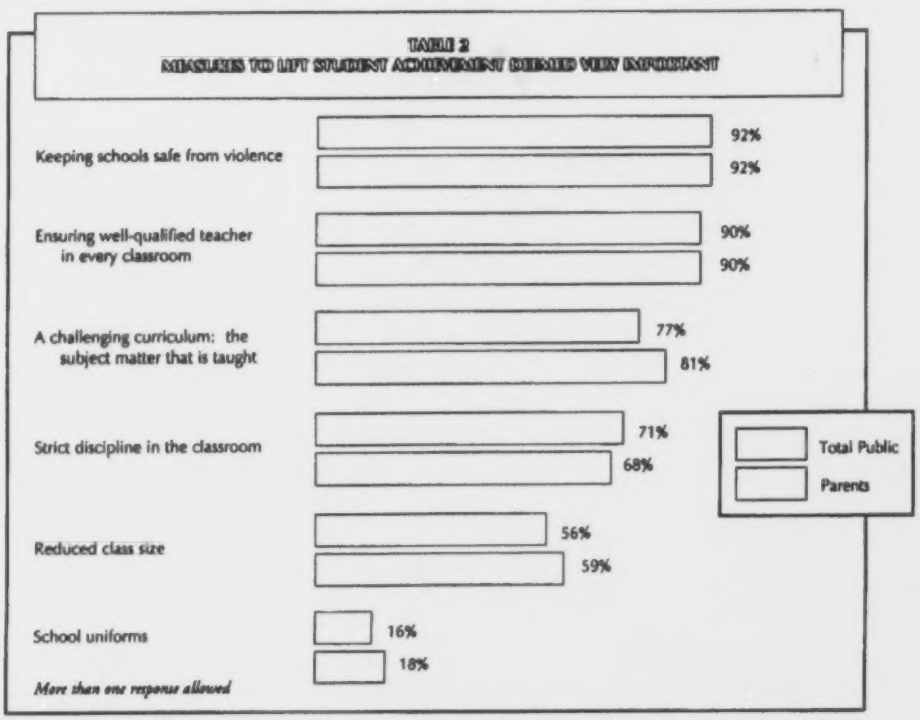
There was consistent agreement on this point across all demographic groups, education levels, and political affiliations. At the same time, the adoption of school uniforms—a favored nostrum of both the President and a number of prominent conservatives—gets low marks from the public: just 16% of respondents think it is a very important means of lifting student achievement, and fewer than 10% of those who are now or have been a teacher do.

To narrow the field somewhat, interviewers asked people to choose only one of the following three items that they thought had "the greatest influence on student learning":

a) Requiring achievement tests in core academic subjects;

b) Establishing a system of academic standards required to be met by all students; and

c) The quality and caliber of their teachers.

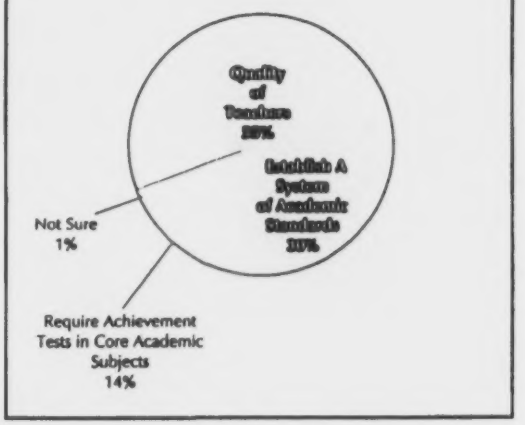


The quality and caliber of teachers was chosen by nearly a 2:1 majority over the next closest education improvement strategy. Parents of school-aged children demonstrated an even stronger commitment to the quality teaching agenda.

In addition, a majority of Republicans and Democrats favored the quality teaching reform agenda, with Republican support even stronger than Democratic (59% vs. 52% respectively).

Interestingly, establishing a system of academic standards required to be met by all students finds its highest base of support among former and/or current teachers (34%), but is still substantially eclipsed by the issue of teacher quality.

TABLE 3
GREATEST INFLUENCE ON STUDENT LEARNING



High Standards Supported for All Students

At the same time, a 68% to 30% majority of Americans agrees that most children are capable of learning demanding academic subject matter and should be required to meet the same set of academic standards. Strongest support for this proposition is found among Latino and black respondents (79% and 71% respectively).

TABLE 4
AGREE OR DISAGREE: MOST CHILDREN ARE CAPABLE OF LEARNING DEMANDING ACADEMIC SUBJECT MATTER AND SHOULD BE REQUIRED TO MEET THE SAME SET OF ACADEMIC STANDARDS

	Total Public %	White %	Black %	Latino %
Total Agree	68	67	71	79
Agree strongly	36	32	48	51
Agree somewhat	32	35	23	28
Total Disagree	30	32	26	18
Disagree somewhat	20	21	17	8
Disagree strongly	10	11	9	10
Not sure	1	1	1	1

More than one response allowed

A majority of Americans agrees that most children are capable of learning demanding academic subject matter.

Similarly, the public strongly rejects the proposition that student academic performance is primarily influenced by natural ability rather than by hard work, as seen in Table 5.

This rejection of a "Bell Curve" philosophy which bases student academic performance primarily on inherited ability is seen most clearly among Latino and black respondents and—not surprisingly—among those who indicated that they felt most students could learn demanding academic subjects. At the same time, those polled viewed the practice of dividing students into separate academic tracks with approval, agreeing that "tracking" is helpful to students placed in advanced tracks (79%); all students (67%); and students placed in slow tracks (65%). However, while 78% of current and former teachers feel the practice is helpful to those placed in advanced tracks, this segment of the cross-section feels less certain that the practice is either helpful to all students (53%) or helpful to students placed in slow tracks (52%).

The public strongly rejects the proposition that student academic performance is primarily influenced by natural ability rather than by hard work.

Qualified Teachers Deemed Key to Unlocking Children's Learning Potential

The entire cross-section was asked to consider how important having a highly qualified teacher was to helping a child achieve his or her full learning potential. Ninety-three percent indicated that it was either "the most important element in education" (31%) or a "very important" (62%) element.

How the Public Defines Teaching Excellence

In its 1996 report, *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*, the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future noted that to be fully competent, teachers require strong academic preparation in the discipline they teach, deep understanding of how children learn, and an equally significant grasp of pedagogy—the way to organize instruction so that children can learn. Further, the Commission went on to recommend a range of quality assurance measures to strengthen teacher recruitment and preparation. What are the qualifications the public feels to be "very important for an excellent teacher to have?"

TABLE 5
STUDENT PERFORMANCE: PRIMARILY DETERMINED BY A STUDENT'S NATURAL ABILITY OR BY A STUDENT'S HARD WORK?

	Total Public %	White %	Black %	Latino %
Primarily determined by:				
A student's hard work	62	61	66	67
A student's natural ability	19	20	15	18
Both equal	18	18	17	14
Not sure	1	1	2	1

Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding

The basic knowledge and skills the public feels are most important for an excellent teacher to have track strongly with the National Commission's recommendations with respect to teacher preparation. However, two qualifications that are often invoked by proponents of quality teaching were rated of less importance by the public, in a dead heat with each other:

- A master's degree from an accredited school of education (37%); and
- A strong liberal arts education (37%).

Ironically, those people rating a master's degree from an accredited school of education the lowest were those who had some postgraduate education and those who had been, or were currently, teaching. Among other qualifications deemed important for excellent teachers to have was knowing how to "speak and understand the language used in a student's home when it is other than English." The strongest support for this came from blacks (59%); low-income individuals (48%); Latinos (40%); and single parents (50%).

Teachers require strong academic preparation in the discipline they teach, deep understanding of how children learn, and an equally significant grasp of pedagogy.

TABLE 6
TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS FELT TO BE VERY IMPORTANT

	Total Public %	White %	Black %	Latino %	High School or Less %	Some College %	4 Yr. College %	Post Graduate %
Well-trained and knowledgeable about how to teach effectively	92	93	91	91	92	93	91	88
Thoroughly educated in the subjects he/she teaches	91	91	94	87	92	91	86	87
Understanding of how people learn	90	90	93	89	90	91	89	87
Ability to establish good relationships with children and adolescents	90	90	89	91	90	89	88	88
Ability to communicate well with parents	86	85	93	87	89	84	83	73
Basic sensitivity to each child as an individual	83	83	85	85	84	82	81	82
At least a semester's experience in a classroom as a student teacher	79	80	78	77	81	77	76	74
In-depth understanding of child/adolescent development	76	74	82	79	81	74	66	62
Solid understanding of community in which he/she will teach	61	58	74	70	68	57	48	49
A master's degree from an accredited school of education	37	35	51	44	50	29	19	17
A strong liberal arts education	37	35	44	50	40	34	33	36
Knows how to speak and understand the language used in a student's home when it is other than English	36	32	59	40	43	32	22	21

More than one response allowed

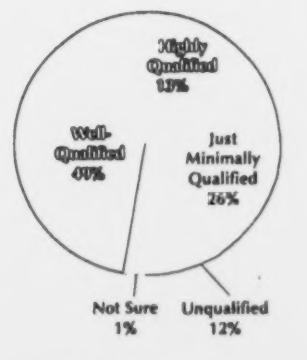
Teachers Get Passing Grades in Local Schools

Respondents were asked to rate most teachers in the schools where they live.

TABLE 7
RATING OF TEACHERS IN THEIR OWN COMMUNITY

Individuals in the lowest income bracket were more prone to rate their teachers "just minimally qualified" (30 percent), as were those who lived in rural areas (32 percent).

TABLE 8
RATING OF TEACHERS IN THEIR OWN STATE



Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding

At first glance, the 69% who say teachers in their own schools are "highly" or "well-qualified" seem to provide a solid vote of confidence. However, although 50% of the public rate the teachers in their schools "well-qualified," this is only a second-place showing given the question's four-part rating scale. Only 19% say their teachers are "highly qualified," while a higher 23% rate their local teachers as "just minimally qualified" or less.

Individuals in the lowest income bracket were more prone to rate their teachers "just minimally qualified" (30%), as were those who lived in rural areas (32%).

Rating Across States More Mixed

There is a well-known phenomenon in polling that people rate the performance of schools in their own neighborhoods higher than schools nationally or at the state level. There is a natural psychological bias, particularly pronounced among parents, to give the school to which they send their own children the benefit of the doubt when it comes to judgments of quality—reserving more negative assessments for the schools (or teachers) of others. Therefore, when individuals were asked to rate most teachers in their home state, a lower 62% rated them as "highly" or "well-qualified." Twice the number rated their state's teachers as "just minimally qualified" than rated them "highly qualified."

On this question, those in the income category of $75,001 + were more likely to rate their state's teachers as "just minimally qualified" or "unqualified" (37%).

Teacher Workload Underestimated...

Obviously, many factors go into how individuals rate the teachers in their own community and state. One factor is the perception of the total number of hours in a day respondents think the average classroom teacher puts in at work.

In this regard, the public clearly underestimates the number of hours the average classroom teacher works each day. Only a third peg their work day at nine hours or longer—consistent with the 9.2 hours per day the average teacher works, according to the NEA.[3]

TABLE 9
ESTIMATES OF HOURS A DAY THE AVERAGE TEACHER WORKS

	Total Public %	Total Parents %
6 hours	22	24
7 hours	14	15
8 hours	27	24
9 hours	17	17
Longer	18	19
Not sure	2	1
Median	7.5 hrs.	7.8 hrs.

Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding

...But More Time for Teacher Development Supported

On the other hand, the public strongly favors lengthening the school year by two weeks to allow more time for teacher consultation and planning (61% in favor vs. 36% opposed). Among blacks, 73% favored this measure (vs. 24% opposed), with comparably strong support among single parents (73%).

Another indication of the public's support for a more robust professional development agenda for teaching is that nearly 71% agree with the statement that "public schools should pay teachers for longer work days so they have time to stay up with new developments in their own fields." This proposition finds its strongest base of support among Latino parents (83%), those of the general public who indicated that education should be the top election issue (77%), and the significant majority of parents and single parents (72% and 84%, respectively).

The public clearly underestimates the number of hours the average classroom teacher works each day.

TABLE 10
LENGTHENING THE SCHOOL YEAR TO ALLOW FOR TEACHER PLANNING

	Total Public %	Total Parents %	Single Parents %	Whites %	Blacks %	Latinos %
Favor	61	62	73	58	73	64
Oppose	36	35	24	39	24	34
Not sure	3	2	—	3	1	2

Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
—Means zero response

[3] NEA, *Status of the American Public School Teacher, 1995-96*, 1997. N.B. This number combines the average length of the required school day (7.3 hours) with the average number of hours spent after the required workday on instruction-related activities, such as lesson preparation and paper grading (1.9 hours).

Specific Information on Teacher Qualifications Desired

Many respondents reject out of hand the old shibboleth that "good teachers are born and not made."

The vast majority of Americans (79%) feel that parents should receive specific information at the beginning of the school year on how qualified their child's teachers are according to required state standards for teachers. Support for this measure was strongest among blacks and Latinos (both at 83%), as well as parents of secondary school students (90%). Individuals with a postgraduate degree, and those who are now teaching or have previously taught, felt less strongly about this measure (61% and 58%, respectively).

Mixed Views About Many Current Teacher Recruitment, Preparation, and Development Practices

The survey sought to find out respondents' agreement with a number of statements reflecting policies, practices, and perspectives on the teaching profession.

Their responses yielded a complex assessment of a range of issues that strike at the heart of the teacher quality challenge. For example, while almost three fourths of the cross-section agree that their school district hires fully qualified teachers, less than two fifths (37%) agree strongly that they do.[4]

TABLE 11
ATTITUDES TOWARD POLICIES AND PRACTICES AFFECTING TEACHERS

	Total Agree %	Agree Strongly %	Agree Somewhat %	Total Disagree %	Disagree Somewhat %	Disagree Strongly %	Not Sure %
Most colleges and universities that prepare teachers are doing a good job	75	29	46	19	13	6	6
Your local school district hires fully qualified teachers	74	37	37	18	12	6	6
Standards for licensing a teacher in your state should be tied to standards for student performance in classes they have taught	71	36	34	25	15	10	5
Current teacher licensing standards in your state guarantee that teachers who are allowed to practice really know how to teach	66	36	30	28	19	9	6
Teacher unions support setting high standards for teachers	55	27	27	34	18	16	12
Teacher unions too often stand in the way of real reform	53	26	27	32	19	13	15
Teachers should be paid according to how well their students perform on tests that measure academic performance	33	16	17	66	27	39	1
Good teachers are born and not made	30	15	16	67	23	44	7
Teacher education is a waste of time	4	2	2	94	10	84	1

More than one response allowed

[4]N.B. In these crucial barometers of quality assurance, "agree somewhat" seems to be at best a lukewarm endorsement, given the question's four-part rating scale. Accordingly, we focus particular attention on those numbers of the cross-section in "strong agreement" as a better proxy for the strength of public sentiment on several key issues.

Similarly, while more than two thirds (66%) agree that current teacher licensing standards in their states guarantee that teachers who are allowed to practice really know how to teach, only 36% of those polled strongly agree with this proposition. Skepticism rises along with income on this score, with only 26% of respondents in the $75,000+ income category strongly agreeing with the statement. Significantly, individuals who have taught or are teaching now are among the most critical of current state teacher licensing standards—with only 30% agreeing that current teacher licensing standards are rigorous enough.

On one important issue, the role of teacher education in quality teaching, the public rejects by a nearly unanimous 94% to 4% the proposition that "teacher education is a waste of time" (a view shared by some who advocate that any intelligent person can quickly become competent to teach without undertaking serious formal educational preparation in how to teach). In addition, a solid 67% to 31% rejects out of hand the old shibboleth that "good teachers are born and not made." Indeed, only 15% of the cross-section mustered strong agreement for this statement.

TABLE 12
POLICIES AND PRACTICES AFFECTING TEACHERS: DEMOGRAPHIC PATTERNS

	Total Agree Strongly:							
	Total Public %	Under $15K %	$15-25K %	$25-35K %	$35-50K %	$50-75K %	$75K+ %	Former/ Current Teachers %
Most colleges and universities that prepare teachers are doing a good job	29	36	35	31	28	25	22	21
Your local school district hires fully qualified teachers	37	35	36	37	39	40	37	51
Standards for licensing a teacher in your state should be tied to standards for student performance in classes they have taught	36	42	39	42	35	35	29	24
Current teacher licensing standards in your state guarantee that teachers who are allowed to practice really know how to teach	36	41	39	40	37	34	26	30
Teacher unions support setting higher standards for teachers	27	30	37	32	27	23	24	28
Teacher unions too often stand in the way of real reform	26	29	25	22	23	29	31	26
Teachers should be paid according to how well their students perform on tests that measure academic achievement	16	22	13	18	15	12	15	9
Good teachers are born and not made	15	18	20	13	13	12	12	15
Teacher education is a waste of time	2	5	3	2	2	3	3	3

More than one response allowed

At the same time, while three fourths agree that most colleges and universities that prepare teachers are "doing a good job," only 29% of those surveyed agree strongly on this point. Those who are teaching or have taught are among the least likely to be in strong agreement on this one (21%). As above, we believe the "agree somewhat" response indicates rather lukewarm approval for the status quo in teacher education.

The nation will need to hire two million teachers over the next ten years.

Finally, there is surprisingly weak public sentiment (just 33%) for paying teachers according to how well their students perform on tests that measure academic achievement. The public renders a split decision on whether teacher unions support setting high standards for teachers or whether teacher unions too often stand in the way of real reform (55% vs. 53%, respectively)—with a more positive assessment of unions winning out by a narrow margin.

The Pivotal Issue of Teacher Pay

Several questions focused on teacher pay: first, whether people felt that most teachers in their own community were "overpaid," "well paid," "just adequately paid," or "inadequately paid." Nearly seven in ten felt that teachers were "just adequately paid" and/or "inadequately paid." A similar assessment holds true for teachers in their home state (71%). Asked to identify the average teacher salary in the U.S., a plurality of respondents chose $38,000, near the national average,[5] with approximately equal numbers overestimating or underestimating average teacher pay in their state.

Meeting America's Teacher Recruitment Challenges: Steer Clear of Quick Fixes

Participants in the poll were told the nation will need to hire two million teachers over the next ten years because of growing enrollments and teacher retirements. They then were asked to indicate whether they favored or opposed a number of strategies for meeting the nation's teacher recruitment challenges.

Significantly, establishing special programs for new teachers in which able, veteran teachers would serve as mentors to newly hired teachers garnered the strongest response. Equally significant, while eight out of ten Americans would favor strengthening state requirements for teacher licensure to meet the challenge, a nearly comparable 78% would favor raising salaries to address the unprecedented hiring demand now expected.

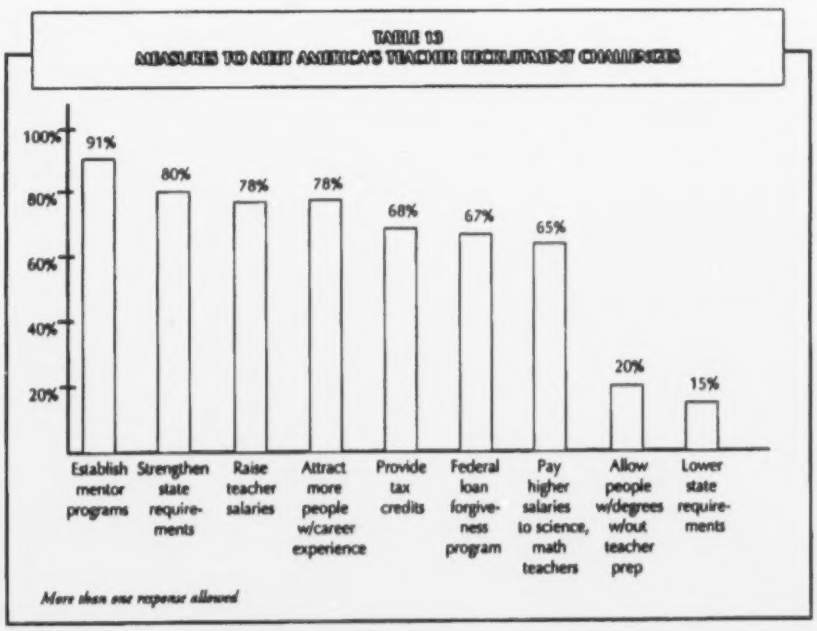
Having the federal government provide loans to prospective teachers that would be "forgiven" on the condition that the teachers teach in disadvantaged schools (as called for in the recently Reauthorized Higher Education Amendments) is also given strong support (67%). The public also overwhelmingly favors attracting more people currently working in other fields into teacher preparation (78%), and paying higher salaries to those who teach science or math because qualified teachers are hard to find in those subject areas (65%).

[5] NEA, *Status of the American Public School Teacher, 1995-96*, 1997.

However, "allowing people with bachelor's degrees to become teachers without requiring preparation in the field of education" and/or "lowering state requirements for the training needed to become a licensed teacher" ranked at the bottom of what the public is prepared to support in meeting the nation's teaching challenge (20% and 15%, respectively).

Overall, these findings—combined with the qualifications for excellent teachers rated most highly by the public—should be heartening news for those who have supported the standards movement in quality teaching but have been concerned about the public's engagement on these issues, or its understanding of the complexities of teaching. Put into perspective, the findings indicate that the public 1) understands how critical top-quality teaching is to getting children to learn; 2) understands the complexity and breadth of knowledge and skills required to be an excellent teacher; 3) supports a broader public investment in teacher learning by granting teachers extra time in the school year and the school day for professional development; 4) is skeptical of quick-fix solutions that take high risks by accepting unprepared candidates into the profession; and 5) gives tepid approval of the job most colleges and universities preparing teachers are doing, while also recognizing the vital role that teacher training institutions must play in strengthening the profession and in preparing teaching's next generation.

The public is skeptical of quick-fix solutions that take high risks by accepting unprepared candidates into the profession.



Despite Quality Concerns, Parents Trust Their Children's Teachers By and Large

Almost one in three felt they got too little information about their child's education, a feeling most emphatically felt by low-income, black, and single parents.

More and more school leaders and school reformers have realized the importance of establishing a strong bond of communication between parents and schools. Parents of school-aged children who responded to the survey (35%) were asked how many times in the past year they had met with their child's teachers. Two thirds said they had met three times or more with their child's teacher over the last year, a percentage that rose with the education level of the parent.

Parents were also asked if they felt welcome in their child's school, and 87% indicated that they did, with a higher 97% of private school parents reporting that they felt welcome in their child's school.

Parents next were asked where they felt they got the most reliable information regarding their child's school. Over four in ten (42%) indicated their child's teacher as the source of the most reliable information. The media ranked rather low in this regard, with only 2% saying they get their most reliable information about their child's school from them.

Parents also were asked whether they felt the quantity of information they received about their child's education from school officials was adequate. Almost one in three felt they got too little information, a feeling most emphatically felt by low-income, black, and single parents. However, a 61% majority felt they got "the right amount of information regarding their child's education" (less than 3% of respondents felt they "get too much information").

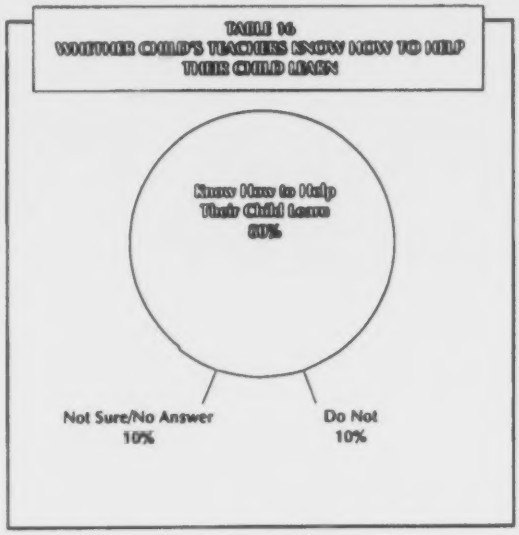
TABLE 16
WHERE PARENTS GET MOST RELIABLE INFORMATION ABOUT CHILD'S SCHOOL

			Child In:						
	Total Parents %	Single Parent %	Pre-K-8th Grade %	Secondary School %	Public School %	Private School %	White %	Latino %	Black %
From the teacher	42	35	44	40	42	50	39	48	55
From your child	18	24	18	18	18	15	20	9	10
From the local school	12	12	12	14	14	7	12	15	7
From other parents	7	5	8	5	7	9	7	2	7
From the media	2	1	1	3	2	2	2	1	2
From school district	1	—	2	—	1	1	1	3	—
Other	8	3	7	13	9	9	9	5	8
Not sure/No answer	10	18	8	7	8	7	10	16	11

Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
—Means no response

Parents were also asked whether their child's teachers were knowledgeable about the subjects they teach. A high 85% felt their child's teachers were knowledgeable (96% among Latino respondents). Parents also were asked whether or not their child's teachers know how to help them learn.

A full 80% answered that their child's teachers do know how to help their child learn. All in all, these results add up to a strong vote of confidence in their own children's teachers. As with the findings regarding how people viewed the teachers in their community vs. those across their state, greater direct familiarity seems to be linked to a more favorable rating by the public of the job that teachers are doing.



Diversity in Teaching Ranks Supported...

The entire sample was asked whether it is important that students have teachers from different ethnic/cultural backgrounds than their own, as well as whether they felt it was important or not that the racial composition of a school's staff reflect the ethnic makeup of the student body.

Most respondents thought that it was "very" or "somewhat important" for students to have teachers from different ethnic/cultural backgrounds than their own.

Nearly 60% thought that it was very or somewhat important for students to have teachers from different ethnic/cultural backgrounds than their own; a closely comparable 57% felt it important that the racial composition of the school's staff reflect the ethnic makeup of the student body. Blacks, Latinos, current and former teachers were more likely to hold these views.

...But Same-Race Role Models Are Less of an Issue

The proposition that students have teachers who are of the same ethnic or cultural background as the students they teach—the "role model" or "cultural matching" arguments for minority teacher recruitment—receives only weak support (41%) from the public (40% among Latinos, 55% among blacks).

Influence of Types of People on Individuals' Lives

Next, people were asked how much influence different people in their lives had had on their career choice. Not surprisingly, parents had the most influence (according to 48% of the cross-section), with teachers accorded a great deal of influence on their career choice by nearly a quarter (24%) of the American public.

TABLE 17
VIEWS ON IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSITY IN TEACHER RANKS

Very/Somewhat Important for:	Total Public %	Total Parents %	Single Parents %	White %	Latino %	Black %
Students to have teachers who are of different ethnic and cultural background from the students they teach	59	56	61	56	60	75
The racial composition of a school's staff to reflect the ethnic makeup of the student body	57	53	74	55	55	71

More than one response allowed

TABLE 18
HAVING TEACHERS OF SAME ETHNIC OR CULTURAL BACKGROUND AS STUDENTS

Very/Somewhat Important for:	Total Public %	White %	Latino %	Black %	Current/ Former Teachers %
Students to have teachers who are of the same ethnic or cultural background as the students they teach	41	39	40	55	35

More than one response allowed

Teachers Top List of Professions Offering Most Benefit to Society

In 1996, Recruiting New Teachers conducted a survey with the Advertising Council that asked which professions were perceived by the American public as providing the "most benefit to society." Two years ago, people in all age groups and geographic regions chose teaching (57%) as the profession providing the "most benefit to society," 2:1 over its nearest rival. By comparison, physicians were considered to provide the "most benefit to society" by only one in four respondents (25%), while lawyers (3%), businesspersons (3%), politicians (3%), and journalists (2%) lagged still further behind.

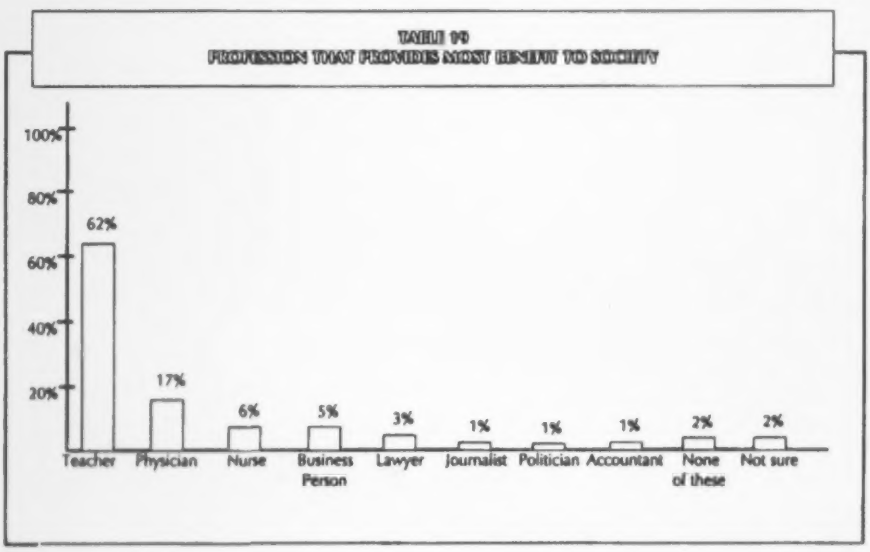
We asked the question again in the current survey. The responses are listed in Table 19.

In terms of the public's perception of which profession provides the "most benefit to society," teachers now outrank physicians by more than 3:1, a figure that rises with the level of education—for example, people with a post-graduate degree identified teachers providing most benefit over physicians by more than 5:1 (71% to 14%).

Yet, despite the high societal value placed on teaching, medicine was the career that they would most recommend to a family member.

Clearly, the perception that teachers are not paid well takes its toll here. However, despite the obvious disparity in their average lifetime earnings (close to 5:1) physicians and teachers rank almost neck and neck (statistically in a dead heat). Teaching even edges out medicine as a recommended career choice among some sectors of public opinion (for example, women: 41% vs. 38%; current or former teachers: 48% vs. 30%; individuals with a post graduate degree: 46% to 43%; and individuals for whom education was a top election issue: 44% to 40%). Overall, these findings (combined with the results of RNT's previous surveys and those of other organizations) indicate that there has been a steady rise in

In the public's perception of which profession provides the most benefit to society, teachers now outrank physicians by more than 3:1.

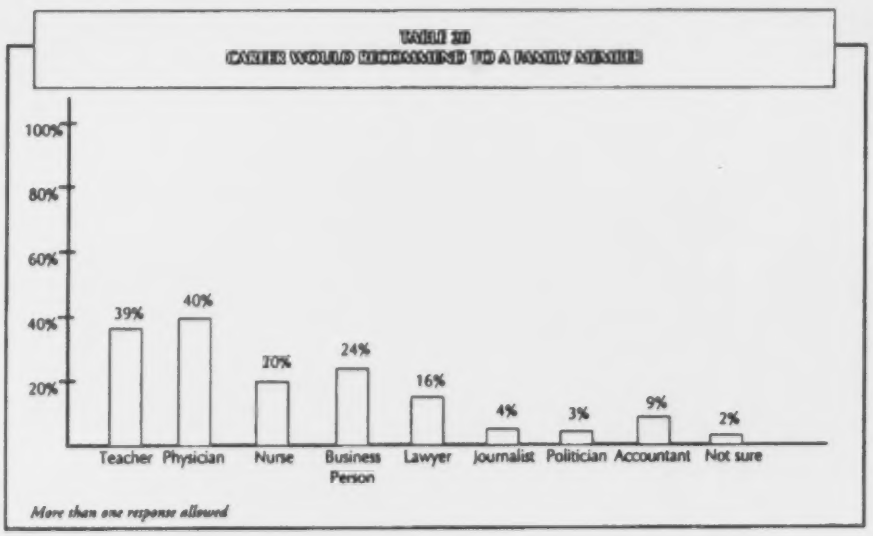


esteem for the profession over the last fifteen years,[6] a factor that could prove crucial in meeting the teacher recruitment challenges the nation faces.

Salary Still a Strong Influence on Career Choices and Among "Career Influencers"

Findings indicate that there has been a steady rise in esteem for the profession over the last fifteen years.

The strong showing of teaching as a recommended career choice adds urgency to the need to find new incentives and reduce unnecessary financial barriers to individuals pursuing teaching as a career. This point is further underscored by another question which asked whether or not each person would consider becoming a teacher himself or herself if teachers were guaranteed an income of $60,000/year. A majority (56%) indicated that they would. Highest were 18 to 29-year-olds (64%). When Americans were asked if they would consider recommending teaching as a career to a family member if teaching guaranteed an income of $60,000/year, the response rose dramatically: 81% indicated that they would encourage a family member to become a teacher if this kind of pay were in the offing. Thus, boosting teacher salaries might not only expand the pool of prospective teachers substantially among key demographic groups, but also increase the likelihood that key career influencers would recommend that family members pursue a pathway into teaching.



[6] Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools; Annual Survey of *The American Freshman*, Higher Education Research Institute, University of California at Los Angeles; Recruiting New Teachers, Inc., 1996; Louis Harris & Associates, Inc., April, 1997.

Strong Support for Educational Opportunity and Public Education

America faces some daunting educational challenges, and there have been some who have questioned whether the public's support for public education has weakened over the years. The American people were asked whether they favor guaranteeing a free public education—a question that has drawn worried concern by policymakers viewing the increasing pressure to privatize public education, in particular by voucher proponents. Notwithstanding such anxieties, support was nearly unanimous (98%) in favor of guaranteeing a public education for all children.

People were also asked to express agreement or disagreement with a series of statements about teaching and educational opportunity in America (particularly for disadvantaged and minority school children).

TABLE 21
FAVOR OR OPPOSE THE GUARANTEE OF A FREE PUBLIC EDUCATION

	Total Public %	White %	Latino %	Black %
Favor	98	97	98	97
Oppose	2	2	*	3
Not sure	*	1	2	—

—Means zero response
** Means less than one percent*

Eight out of ten Americans believe that "we should ensure that all children, including those who are economically disadvantaged, have teachers who are fully qualified, even if it means spending more money to achieve that." More than eight out of ten Americans believe that "we must give a high national priority to recruiting and preparing teachers who can provide quality education for our children, especially those who are in most need to be helped to learn."

Support was nearly unanimous in favor of guaranteeing a public education for all children.

TABLE 22
PROPOSITIONS ON EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY IN AMERICA

Agree Strongly:	Total Public %	White %	Latino %	Black %
We should ensure that all children, including those who are economically disadvantaged, have teachers who are fully qualified, even if it means spending more money to achieve that.	83	82	81	90
We must give a high national priority to recruiting and preparing teachers who can provide quality education for our children, especially those who need the most help to learn.	83	81	86	91
The United States must give a much higher priority to kindergarten through high school.	79	77	80	86
In America, the same educational opportunities are available to minority and non-minority children alike.	33	34	33	28
In America, the same educational opportunities are available to children who live in poor neighborhoods as those who live in affluent neighborhoods.	24	24	24	22

More than one response allowed

TABLE 20
CAN AMERICA PAY MORE ATTENTION TO EDUCATING THE MOST DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN TO KEEP THE COUNTRY FROM GOING INTO A SERIOUS DECLINE

	Total Public %	White %	Latino %	Black %
Will be possible to do	84	83	89	92
Won't be possible to do	13	14	10	7
Not sure	3	4	1	1

Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding

It is possible to summon the national will to educate our most disadvantaged children.

At the same time, only one in three Americans agrees strongly that the same educational opportunities are currently available to non-minority and minority students and less than one fourth of all Americans believe that the same educational opportunities are available to children who live in poor neighborhoods as those who live in affluent ones. Yet, notwithstanding all of the challenges facing education, more than eight out of ten Americans believe that it is possible to summon the national will to educate our most disadvantaged children and to prevent the country from going into serious decline. In sum, the American people strongly support the continuance of public education and see quality teaching as the key to unlocking the promise of equal educational opportunity and achieving the American Dream. As seen elsewhere in the survey and below, these convictions permeate the public's response to a range of proposed education reforms.

Quality Teaching vs. Vouchers and Charter Schools

The quality teaching agenda was pitted head to head against two emerging trends in school reform—allowing parents to take public money for private school education, and allowing new public schools to be started by outside for-profit education companies.

When people were asked if they favored "allowing parents to take public money for private school education" or "doing what it takes to get a fully qualified teacher in every classroom," a decisive 84% vs. 14% favored "doing what it takes to get a fully qualified teacher in every classroom" as the better way to make schools what they ought to be. Support on this issue was strong among all groups and political affiliations, but strongest among those with incomes under $25,000, and blacks.

These findings stand in stark contrast to the views of private school voucher proponents who claim widespread support for their policies in low-income and African American communities. When pitted head to head against strengthening the teaching profession and putting a qualified teacher in every classroom, support for vouchers pales startlingly by comparison. Indeed, for those who rated education as a top election issue in November, 88% would favor "doing what it takes to put a fully qualified teacher in every classroom" vs. just 10% who would favor "allowing parents to take public money for private school."

Another strategy advanced to "shake up the system" in education is to allow new public schools to be started by outside for-profit education companies. Once again, in head-to-head competition with "doing what it takes to put a fully qualified teacher in every classroom," such proposals received only wan support (87% vs. 11%). Here again, support for qualified teachers was highest among low-income groups and blacks, as well as those for whom education would be a top election issue in 1998.

TABLE 26
FINAL CHOICE: DO WHAT IT TAKES TO GET A QUALIFIED TEACHER IN EVERY CLASSROOM OR ALLOW PARENTS TO USE MONEY SPENT ON THEIR CHILD'S PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATION FOR A PRIVATE SCHOOL EDUCATION?

	Total Public %	White %	Latino %	Black %
Doing what it takes to get a fully qualified teacher in every classroom	84	83	83	94
Allowing parents to use money spent on their child's education in public schools for a private education	14	15	15	6
Not sure	2	3	2	—

—Means zero response
Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 28
FINAL CHOICE: DO WHAT IT TAKES TO GET A QUALIFIED TEACHER IN EVERY CLASSROOM OR ALLOW PARENTS TO GET TOGETHER TO HIRE OUTSIDE ORGANIZATIONS TO SET UP AN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL AS PART OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM?

	Total Public %	White %	Latino %	Black %
Doing what it take to get a fully qualified teacher in every classroom	87	87	87	95
Allowing parents to get together to hire an outside organization to set up an independent school as part of the public school system	11	12	10	3
Not sure	2	2	3	2

Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding

Education Ranked High Among the Public's Electoral Concerns

November's vote underscored the importance of educational issues to the electorate. The results of this poll, which sampled public opinion in August and September 1998, clearly suggested that such would be the case.

A majority would vote against a candidate with whom they agreed on most issues but disagreed on education issues.

Two questions were asked to gauge the significance of education as a cutting edge electoral issue:

- How important a candidate's position on education would be to people in the November elections;
- Whether they would vote for or against a congressional candidate with whom they agreed on most issues, but with whose stand on education they disagreed.

TABLE 2b
INFLUENCE OF A CANDIDATE'S POSITION ON EDUCATION POLICY ON THE VOTE

	Very Important Influence %
Total Public	57
Men	50
Women	64
Under $15,000	64
$15,001-25,000	61
$25,001-35,000	62
$35,001-50,000	59
$50,001-75,000	52
Over $75,000	46
White	53
Latino	59
Black	81

Fifty-seven percent said that a candidate's position on education would be a very important influence in the November elections. A higher 64% of women indicated that it would, and a higher still 81% of blacks indicated the importance of this issue (compared to 53% and 59% of whites and Latinos, respectively). Seventy-two percent of single parents and nearly six in ten of all parents (59%) say that a candidate's position on education would be a very important influence on their vote. Less than 6% of all respondents said that a candidate's position on education would not be a very important influence or no influence at all in the November elections.

Income does make a difference among respondents as well—poor and middle-income respondents place the highest premium on a candidate's position on education; upper-income respondents the lowest. A more significant showing of the importance of this issue was the fact that a majority would vote against a candidate with whom they agreed on most issues but disagreed on education issues, a figure that rises to 60% of women, 62% of blacks, and 61% of those in the 50-64 age bracket (among the most likely voters in any election). Indeed, one of the most striking findings to come out of the survey is the strength of the teacher quality agenda as a potential cutting edge issue in Election '98.

* * *

What's the bottom line? The single most important way to make education what it needs to be in this country is to put a qualified teacher in every classroom. The public knows it. This poll shows it. Policymakers concerned with education reform at the national, state, and local levels would do well to mark its lessons with care.

RECRUITING NEW TEACHERS, INC.
NATIONWIDE SURVEY ON TEACHERS

1. I would like to read you some things that people have said are problems with public schools. After I read each one, please tell me if you think that problem is very serious, somewhat serious, not very serious, or not at all serious. Keep in mind that a problem may be serious, but "very serious" means a problem is both serious and widespread. Would you say (ITEM) is very serious and widespread, somewhat serious, not very serious, or not at all serious?

1. Students' lack of basic skills
2. Student absenteeism
3. Drop-out rates
4. Student drug use
5. Student drinking
6. Teenage pregnancy
7. School violence
8. Lack of parental involvement
9. Poor quality teachers
10. Poor student motivation
11. Lack of up-to-date technology/computers
12. Large classes
13. Teaching out of subject matter
14. Lack of choice about what school a child can attend

2. Please tell me how important you think each of the following measures is to lifting student achievement: very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not important at all?

1. The availability of high-quality textbooks and other instructional materials
2. A challenging curriculum—the subject matter that is taught
3. Ensuring that school buildings and facilities are in good condition
4. Student access to computers in school
5. Reduced class size
6. Ensuring a well-qualified teacher in every classroom
7. Greater parental involvement in children's education
8. Strict discipline in the classroom
9. School uniforms
10. Schools safe from violence
11. Promoting/graduating students solely based on their academic performance
12. Raising per-pupil expenditures
13. Increasing time spent on homework

If you had to choose only ONE of the following items, which ONE do you think has the greatest influence on student learning:

1. Establishing a system of academic standards required to be met by all children
2. Requiring achievement tests in core academic subjects
3. The quality and caliber of their teachers
4. Not sure

4. Tracking is a phrase used in education that describes how some schools place students in more or less advanced classes. Do you think such practices are helpful to (Item)?

1. Students placed in advanced tracks
2. Students placed in slow tracks
3. All students
4. No students

5. Now I want to ask you whether you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly that most children are capable of learning demanding academic subject matter and should be required to meet the same set of academic standards?

Agree strongly
Agree somewhat
Disagree somewhat
Disagree strongly
Not all are capable, but should meet same standards
Not sure

6. Based on your own experience, do you feel that student academic performance is more strongly influenced by natural ability or hard work?

Primarily determined by student's natural ability
Primarily determined by student's hard work
Both equal
Not sure

7. How important do you feel it is to have a highly qualified teacher who can help a child achieve his or her full learning potential—do you think it is the most important element in education, a very important element, somewhat important, or a not very important element?

The most important element in education
Very important
Somewhat important
Not very important
Not sure

8. I want to read you some qualifications that some people feel are important for an excellent teacher to have. For each item, please tell me if you think that quality is very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not important.

1. A strong liberal arts education
2. Thoroughly educated in the subjects they will teach
3. In-depth understanding of child/adolescent development
4. Well-trained and knowledgeable about how to teach effectively
5. A master's degree from an accredited school of education
6. At least a semester's experience in a classroom as a student teacher
7. Ability to communicate well with parents
8. Solid understanding of the community in which he/she will teach
9. Basic sensitivity to each child as an individual
10. Ability to establish good relationships with children/adolescents
11. Understanding of how people learn
12. Know how to speak and understand the language used in a student's home when it is other than English

9. How would you rate most teachers in the schools where you live: highly qualified, well-qualified, just minimally qualified, or unqualified?

Highly qualified
Well-qualified
Just minimally qualified
Unqualified
Not sure

10. Based on your own experience and impression, how would you rate most teachers in your state—highly qualified, well-qualified, just minimally qualified, or unqualified?

Highly qualified
Well-qualified
Just minimally qualified
Unqualified
Not sure

11. If you had to estimate, how many total hours in a day do you think the average classroom teacher puts in at work—6 hours, 7 hours, 8 hours, 9 hours, or longer? [choose one]

6 hours
7 hours
8 hours
9 hours
Longer
Not sure

12. Would you favor or oppose lengthening the school year by two weeks to allow more time for teacher consultation and planning, with students having more study periods?

Favor
Oppose
Not sure

13. Do you agree or disagree with this statement: Public schools should pay teachers for longer work days so they have time to stay up with new developments in their own fields.

Agree
Disagree
Not sure

14. Do you feel or not that parents should receive specific information at the beginning of the school year on how qualified their child's teachers are according to state standards required for permanent teachers?

Information on teacher qualifications should be provided
Information on teacher qualifications should not be provided
Not sure

15. When was the last time you were inside a public school—was it this year, 2-5 years ago, 6-10 years ago, or longer ago than that?

This year
2-5 years ago
6-10 years ago
Longer than 10 years ago
Not sure

16. Now let me read you some additional statements about policies and practices that affect the teaching profession. Based on what you have heard or impressions you may have, tell me if you agree strongly with that statement, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with each of these statements.

1. Standards for licensing a teacher in your state should be tied to standards for student performance in classes they have taught
2. Current teacher licensing standards in your state guarantee that teachers who are allowed to practice really know how to teach
3. Most colleges and universities that prepare teachers are doing a good job
4. Teacher education is a waste of time
5. Good teachers are born and not made
6. Teacher unions support setting high standards for teachers
7. Teacher unions too often stand in the way of real reform
8. Teachers should be paid according to how well their students perform on tests that measure academic achievement
9. Your local school district hires fully qualified teachers

17. Let me ask you about teacher pay. Do you feel that most teachers in your community are overpaid, well paid, just adequately paid, or are inadequately paid?

Overpaid
Well paid
Just adequately paid
Inadequately paid
Not sure

18. In your state as a whole, is it your impression that most teachers are overpaid, well paid, just adequately paid, or are inadequately paid?

Overpaid
Well paid
Just adequately paid
Inadequately paid
Not sure

19. Now, among the following salary levels, which figure do you think represents the average salary of teachers in the United States?

$54,000
$26,000
$38,000
$42,000

20. It is now estimated that we will need to hire two million teachers nationally over the next 10 years because of growing enrollments and teacher retirements. Yet, almost half of all people who are prepared by schools to teach do not enter the profession. To staff our schools, would you favor or oppose (ITEM)?

1. The federal government providing loans to prospective teachers that would be "forgiven" on condition that the teacher teach in disadvantaged schools
2. Allowing people with bachelor's degrees to become teachers without requiring preparation in the field of education
3. Providing tax credits for teachers who work in high-poverty areas
4. Attracting more people currently working in other careers into teacher preparation
5. Lowering state requirements for the training needed to become a licensed teacher
6. Raising teacher salaries
7. Strengthening state requirements for becoming a licensed teacher
8. Establishing special programs for new teachers, in which able, veteran teachers would serve as mentors to newly hired teachers
9. Paying higher salaries to those who teach science or math because qualified teachers are hard to find in those subjects

21. Are you the parent or guardian of a child who attends preschool, kindergarten, elementary school, middle school, junior high, or high school?

Parent of a child in those grades
Not a parent of a child in those grades
Not sure

22. Do your children attend a public school, an independent private school or a religious private school?

Public school
Independent or private
Private religious school
Both public and private schools
Home schooling (volunteered response)
No answer
Both private and religious

23. What is the grade of your oldest child: still in preschool, elementary or secondary school?

Preschool
Kindergarten
First grade
Second grade
Third grade
Fourth grade
Fifth grade
Sixth grade
Seventh grade
Eighth grade
Ninth grade
Tenth grade
Eleventh grade
Twelfth grade
Other

24. How many times in the past year have you met with your child's teachers?

Once
Twice
Three times
More than three times
Not sure

25. Do you feel welcome in your child's school?

Feel welcome
Not feel welcome
Not sure

26. Do you feel that you get too much information, the right amount of information, or too little information from school officials about your child's education?

Get too much information
Right amount of information
Too little information
Not sure

27. Where do you get the most reliable information about your child's school?

From your child
From the teacher
From the local school
From school district
From other parents
From the media
Other (specify)
Not sure

28. Are your child's teachers knowledgeable or not about the subjects they teach?

Knowledgeable
Not knowledgeable
Not sure

29. Do your child's/children's teachers know how to help your child/children learn or not?

Know(s) how to help your child learn
Do(es) not
Not sure

30. In your opinion, how important is it that (ITEM) -- very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not important at all?

1. Students have teachers who are of the same ethnic or cultural background as the students they teach
2. Students have teachers from different ethnic/cultural background from their own
3. The racial composition of a school's staff reflects the ethnic makeup of the student body

31. I want to ask you how much influence different possible people may have had on what you do as a career or spend most of your time on in your life. On a scale of 1 to 5—with 1 meaning "no influence" and a 5 meaning "a great deal of influence"—please rate each of these on how important they were in helping you decide what you wanted to become. You may use any number between "1" and "5."

1. Your parent
2. A teacher
3. A member of the clergy
4. A fellow student or friend
5. Another relative

32. Now let me read you a list of possible professions. If you had to choose, which ONE do you feel provides the most important benefit to society?

Lawyer
Accountant
Teacher
Business Person
Nurse
Journalist
Doctor (physician)
Politician
None of these
Not sure

33. Again, if you had to choose, which ONE OR TWO of these careers would you recommend most highly for a member of your family?

Lawyer
Accountant
Teacher
Business Person
Nurse
Journalist
Doctor (physician)
Politician
None of these
Not sure

34. Now let me ask you, suppose a teacher were guaranteed an income of $60,000 a year. Would you then consider being a teacher yourself, or not?

Would consider
Would not consider
Not sure

35. And if a teacher were guaranteed an income of $60,000 a year, would you encourage a member of your family to consider a teaching career, or not?

Would encourage
Would not encourage
Not sure

36. Now let me read you some statements people have made about teachers and education. Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly that:

1. In America the same educational opportunities are available to minority and non-minority children alike
2. In America the same educational opportunities are available to children who live in poor neighborhoods as those who live in affluent neighborhoods
3. The United States must give a much higher priority to kindergarten through high school education
4. We should ensure that all children, including those who are economically disadvantaged, have teachers who are fully qualified, even if it means spending more money to achieve that
5. We must give a high national priority to recruiting and preparing teachers who can provide quality education for our children, especially those who are most in need to be helped to learn

37. Do you feel convinced that if America made up its mind that we have to pay far more serious attention to the education of our most disadvantaged children to keep the country from going into a serious decline, we can find the will power and the financial resources to get that job done, or do you feel that just won't be possible to achieve?

Will be possible to do
Won't be able to do it
Not sure

38. Every state in America now guarantees that every citizen's child will have a free public education. Do you favor keeping that guarantee of a free public education, or not?

Favor keeping
Oppose
Not sure

39. Some people are proposing to allow parents to take the money the public education system provides for their child's education and use it to attend a private school. Others say to do that would take much-needed funds from public education. Which of the following two choices do you favor most as the better way to make our schools what they ought to be: (1) allowing parents to take public education money and use it to send their child to a private school or (2) doing what it takes to put fully qualified teachers in every public school classroom in America?

Allowing parents to take public education money for private school education
Doing what it takes to get qualified teachers in every classroom
Not sure

40. Some people are proposing to allow parents to get together to hire outside profit-making education companies to create and run whole new independent schools that are part of the public school system. They say these schools will be better than existing schools. Others say a more important goal is to put qualified teachers in every public school classroom. Which of the following two choices do you most favor as the better way to make public schools what they should be:

Allow new public schools to be started by outside education companies
Do what it takes to put a fully qualified teacher in every classroom
Not sure

41. Now, as you think about the upcoming elections in November, will a candidate's position on education be a very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important influence on your vote for Congress?

Very important influence
Somewhat important influence
Not very important influence
Not at all important influence
Not sure

42. Now, suppose a candidate is running for Congress in your district with whom you agree on most issues, but with whose stand on education you disagree. Would you vote for or against that candidate?

Would vote for
Would vote against
Not sure

FACTUALS

F1. Sex
Male
Female

F2. How old are you?

18-to-20	45-to-49
21-to-24	50-to-54
25-to-29	55-to-64
30-to-34	65-to-75
35-to-39	Over 75
40-to-44	Refused

F3. Is the head of this household presently single, married, widowed, divorced, or separated?

Single
Married
Divorced
Widowed
Separated
Other
Refused

F4. Which of the following categories best describes your total 1997 household income?

$15,000 or less	$75,001 - $100,000
$15,001 - $25,000	$100,001 - $150,000
$25,001 - $35,000	$150,000 and over
$35,001 - $50,000	Refused
$50,001 - $75,000	

F5. What was the last grade or level of school you completed?

Eighth grade or less
Some high school
High school degree
Some college, junior college, community college
Four-year college graduate
Postgraduate degree

F6. Are you, or have you ever been a teacher in grades from kindergarten through high school, or not?

Teaching now
Have been a teacher
Have never been a teacher
Not sure

F7. Regardless of how you vote, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat or an Independent?

Republican
Democrat
Independent
Not sure

F8. What is your religion?

Protestant
Catholic
Jewish
Other
Refused
No religion

F9. Are you of Latino descent, or not?

Latino descent
Not of Latino descent
Refused

F10. Do you consider yourself white, black, Asian, or what?

White
Black, African American
Asian or Pacific Islander
American Indian, Native American, or Alaskan Native
Other
Refused

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